



Natural Heritage & Endangered Species  
Program  
Division of Fisheries & Wildlife  
Route 135  
Westborough, MA 01581  
(508)792-7270, ext. 200

## MASSACHUSETTS RARE AND ENDANGERED PLANTS

### Torrey's Beak-rush Rhynchospora torreyana (Gray)

#### Description

Torrey's Beak-rush is a grass-like plant which reaches a height of 2.5 ft (.75 m) and has several stems arising from its clumped basal leaves. Sparse pale brown flower clusters grow from the bases of the few slender leaves that are produced on the stems, the lowest flowers arching or drooping on long stalks. Tiny dark brown fruits (called achenes) have prominently wrinkled surfaces, short beaks (pointed ends), and short (or absent) basal bristles. Flowering and fruiting occurs from mid July through September. This plant is named after John Torrey, an important botanist of the early to mid 1800's.

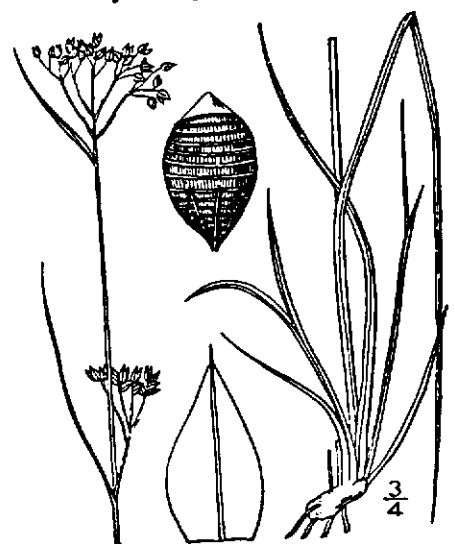
#### Similar Species

Of the six other species of beak-rush known to occur in Massachusetts, Brown Beak-rush (Rhynchospora fusca) is the most similar to Torrey's Beak-rush. Brown Beak-rush can be distinguished from Torrey's Beak-rush by its shorter height and denser flower clusters. Also, the lower flower clusters do not droop and the fruits have long beaks.

#### Range

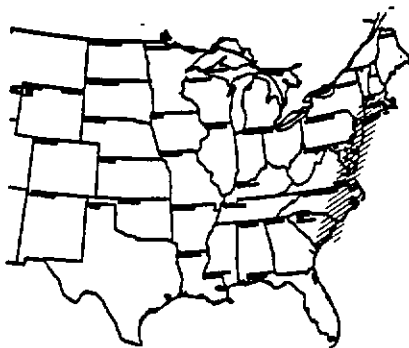
Torrey's Beak-rush is a species of the Atlantic Coastal Plain and seldom extends far inland. It occurs in a narrow band from southeastern Massachusetts to Georgia. No occurrences of this plant have been found north of Plymouth.

*Rhynchospora Torreyana*

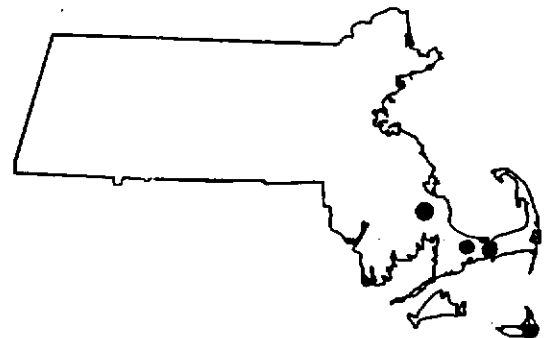


An Illustrated Flora of the  
U.S. and Canada. Vol. I. p. 347.  
Britton and Brown. 1970.

(Continued overleaf)



Distribution



● Verified since 1978  
○ Reported prior to 1978

Distribution in Massachusetts by Town

#### Habitat in Massachusetts

Torrey's Beak-rush grows along the upper margin of seasonally wet, sandy, peaty soils of shallow freshwater pondshores. It prefers full sun and does not compete well with shrubs or coarse herbs. Unfortunately, these requirements eliminate most pondshores as suitable habitat. Associated plants include Canada Bentgrass (Calamagrostis canadensis), Southern Clubmoss (Lycopodium appressum), Clustered Beak-rush (Rhynchospora capitellata), Thread-leaved Sundew (Drosera filiformis), Yellow-eyed Grass (Xyris difformis), and Lance-leaved Violet (Viola lanceolata). On Nantucket, it has adapted to areas that simulate seasonally wet pondshores such as moist mown areas or where the soil has been scraped near the water table.

#### Population Status

Torrey's Beak-rush is listed as Endangered by the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. Since 1978, only eight occurrences have been verified, most with relatively few plants. There is little chance that others will be found, due to a scarcity of suitable habitat in the state. It is also rare in New York, Rhode Island, Delaware and Maryland.